

done it in State legislatures all over the country. They are doing it today on this amendment that Senator KING and I have worked on.

They have turned loose their minions—their anti-consumer minions—and they are now out working, being paid to do whatever they can to defeat whatever we are trying to accomplish. Utilities have joined with the Koch brothers. Utilities are cheerleading this anti-competitive measure that will cost families more money and take away their opportunity to generate clean energy at home.

In Nevada, our utility proposed—and I say “utility” because basically 95 percent of all electricity in Nevada is owned by one company. This big utility proposed, and regulators recently agreed to slash, the value of rooftop solar for customers and imposed those changes retroactively. Can you imagine that? Contracts that had been let, they suddenly said: Well, too bad. We are going to retroactively punch you economically. The entire episode was detailed in a recent edition of the *New York Times*. “Nevada’s Solar Bait-and-Switch.”

This could apply to Arizona. They are trying to do the same thing there and other places in the country. I am not going to read the whole column, but I am going to read a few things:

In late December, the state’s Public Utilities Commission, which regulates Nevada’s energy market, announced a rate change drastic enough to kill Nevada’s booming rooftop solar market and drive providers out of the state. Effective Jan. 1, the new tariffs will gradually increase until they triple monthly fees that solar users pay to use the electric grid and cut by three-quarters—

Seventy-five percent—users’ reimbursements for feeding electricity into [the grid].

They already have a contract. That does not matter. The column goes on to say:

More startlingly, the commission made its decision retroactive. That means that the 17,000 Nevada residents who were lured into solar purchases by state-mandated one-time rebates of up to \$23,000 suddenly discovered that they were victims of a bait-and-switch. They made the deals assume that, allowing for inflation, their rates would stay constant over their contracts’ 20- to 30-year lifetimes; instead, they face the prospect of paying much more for electricity than if they had never made the change, even though they’re generating almost all of their electricity themselves.

That is the power of utilities and Koch brother-like operations that are doing this. The Koch brothers are doing it through a number of billions of dollars that they have invested in controlling America through an organization called ALEC, which is a phony front to work in State legislatures.

The utility in Nevada retroactively tore up the agreements that were made with families and businesses that generate their own clean energy, as indicated in this *New York Times* column. Because of what the utility did, at least three companies have left Ne-

vada, and tens of thousands of families and businesses fear that their power bills will unexpectedly skyrocket because of the changes, and thousands and thousands of Nevadans have lost their jobs—not hundreds, thousands. No one knows the exact number but nearing 10,000.

We should not be pulling the plug on clean energy at a time when more and more Americans are making it work. We should encourage independence. Competition is putting more clean power on our electric grid. We should support this growing solar industry, which is creating jobs. Solar alone created over 35,000 new jobs in 2015, a 20-percent growth rate. With what we did in the omnibus and the tax extenders at the end of the year, it is estimated that in the next 10 years there will be about 350,000 jobs in the solar industry.

That is why Senator KING and I have worked on amendment No. 3120, which would protect residential solar energy customers from the abuse that we have just talked about here and as outlined in the *New York Times*.

This amendment is good for consumers in Nevada and across the country. It will safeguard people who want to generate their own clean energy from retroactive rule changes that could devastate their finances. Unfortunately, monopoly utilities and ideological groups funded by the Koch brothers are working hard to defeat any protections for Americans who generate their own clean energy. Remember, the Koch brothers use their money in a lot of different ways, not the least of which is in the fossil fuel business.

These anti-competitive individuals are fighting our efforts to protect families and businesses from having their contracts torn up and having their bills skyrocket. My friend, the Senator from Maine is on the floor with me. I appreciate his advocacy. He has been at the forefront of this issue, a person who has extensive experience in this whole field, having been a Governor of the State of Maine when the power system there began to change.

He is the sponsor of this amendment. I have joined with him on this amendment. He has been an unwavering advocate for solar energy customers. I hope our colleagues will follow his example and stand for consumers and support each American’s choice to install clean energy on their homes and protect them from retroactive rate hikes and abusive fees.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak

therein and with the time equally divided, with the Democrats controlling the first half.

The Senator from Maine.

SOLAR ENERGY

Mr. KING. Mr. President, the Democratic leader has just outlined the issue that is before us today. I want to put it into some context. The first thing I want to say is that what we are talking about today is the most fundamental of American economic principles—free-market competition. Free-market competition is what we are talking about here.

Now, as the Democratic leader outlined, for 135 years, our electrical system worked basically in the same way that it works today. It has worked because of central powerplants, wires, distribution and transmission systems, and homes. Homes and businesses and offices were the passive receptors of electricity. The utilities have done a wonderful job. I have worked with them over the years. They have done a complex job where the power has to be there when the switch is thrown. They have done a terrific job of serving the American public, but what the American public wants is not necessarily electricity itself, it wants what electricity can do.

A friend of mine once said, for example, that in this country every year, 5 million people buy quarter-inch drills, but nobody wants quarter-inch drills. What they want are holes. What the American people want are microwaves and televisions and computers and electricity and hot water in their homes. How that power comes is really not what they are concerned with, but they do want options.

A revolution has occurred. Without a doubt this system served us well for 130 years, but a revolution has occurred in the last 25 years. This chart dramatically shows what has happened. This is the price of a watt of solar energy. In the 1970s it was \$76. Today it is 36 cents. This is revolutionary. This is disruptive. This is change. What this has enabled is for us to now tap into that very large, fully permitted nuclear fusion device in the sky that delivers power wirelessly to every city, town, village and hamlet on Earth.

That is what we are talking about. Why is this important? For a number of reasons. If you combine the cheaper solar power with smart appliances that can use their power only when it is the most efficacious for the grid—smart meters that many of our grids now have, demand response that allows customers to diminish their demand at times of high demand on the grid, and new storage technologies, if you add all of those together, it is an entirely new world of electricity development. This is where we are today.

We still have central powerplants. We still have wires, but we have homes and businesses making their own electricity and storing their own electricity from that big nuclear fusion